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ABSTRACT

Seven major trends are reflected in the current task force and commission reports on education. The first, "back to basics," stresses intellectual skills, but often at the expense of the affective domain. The second emphasizes the relationship between education, work, and the economy, but the direction schools should take remains unclear, on account of the rapidly changing economy. The third trend, "authority," is primarily a reaction to the permissive attitudes of the sixties, but the calls for greater discipline are incongruous with recent studies of the adverse effects of too much pressure on adolescents. The fourth trend calls for greater state control of school district policy, but this is contradicted in part by the fifth trend toward greater citizen choice and school variety. The sixth trend is toward measurable results and accountability, while the seventh is toward cost-effectiveness, due to the current economic crunch. While these are the dominant themes of current reports on schooling, there is no overall consensus on what needs to be done; there is, however, agreement that the school structure is seriously flawed and that the remedies needed will be long-term ones. Accordingly, of the eight concluding recommendations offered to principals, the first three concern how to read and respond intelligently to the emerging reports. (TE)

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A Review and Comment On the National Reports

Perspectives

by

Theodore R. Sizer

EA 016 374

National Association of Secondary School Principals
Reston, Virginia

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Efforts to reform American education seem to come in cycles, says Theodore R. Sizer, who identifies in this publication seven dominant themes or trends in the current studies of education. After discussing each, he relates them to his "A Study of High Schools," which is co-sponsored by NASSP. He concludes this brief monograph with several suggestions for principals. Sizer is former headmaster of Phillips Academy in Andover, Mass., and former dean of the Harvard Graduate School of Education.

Since the 1930s, American education has experienced a series of cyclical reform efforts, each about a decade long. The beginning of each cycle is generally heralded by intense criticism, angry, expose-type books, and a search for scapegoats.

The formation of study groups and commissions usually follows, and in due course reasoned critiques and recommendations are issued. Those recommendations that seem to best address the criticisms are adopted, thus mollifying the public. A few tranquil years may ensue, but fresh criticisms inevitably arise and the process repeats itself.

We are now at the point in the cycle where the task force and commission reports are being issued. Most of those made public so far follow the pattern of their most successful predecessors: They legitimize what the schools have already started doing in response to the initial criticism.

The 1944 NEA report on "Education for *All* American Youth" legitimized the "life adjustment" direction toward which supposed progressives had begun pushing the high schools in the 1930s. James Bryant Conant in the late 1950s legitimized the consolidated comprehensive high school, already well-established in what he called lighthouse communities. The early 1970s statements by James Coleman (for the President's Science Advisory Commission), B. Frank Brown (for the Kettering Foundation panel), and John Henry Martin (for the U.S. Office of Education), legitimized many high school practices that had surfaced during the 1960s.

Current reports legitimize the more traditional, back-to-basics trends that emerged in schools in the 1970s after adverse public reaction to the perceived disorder of the late 1960s.

There is nothing wrong with legitimization. However, what is important for educators to understand are the diagnoses and trends upon which these reports ultimately ride; the main sources of pressure and response. I have identified seven trends, all of which are reflected — usually explicitly, but sometimes implicitly — in most of the recent statements about reform:

1. There must be a return to "the basics";
2. The connection between school and the economy needs strengthening;
3. Adults must regain authority in the high schools and students should have less freedom than they may have had in the 1960s;
4. The principal agent of reform should be state government;
5. There should be various kinds of schools, and families should be able to choose the ones their children will attend;
6. Schools and students should be judged on the basis of measurable results of teaching and learning;
7. The cost of schools must be reduced.

Clearly, some of these trends conflict. Some appeal to us. Some do not. Let me examine each briefly, relate them to the NASSP-sponsored "Study of High Schools," and present some suggestions for principals.

1. The Basics

The call has gone out for a *traditional academic education for all*, a core of

which the National Commission on Excellence has called the "new basics" — English, mathematics, science, social studies, a bit of computer science and, for some, foreign language. These categories are, of course, not new; with the exception of computer science, they mirror almost precisely the so-called "English Program" which the NEA's Committee of Ten recommended in 1893.

As was also the case in the 1890s, the fine arts and "practical" subjects are dealt with "in addition," implicitly signaling their lesser importance. What is different from the Committee of Ten, however, is that the demand today is for *all* youth to take this program, not just those who can afford to be in high school.

Behind this list of subjects lies the assumption that the primary function of the high school is to help students use their minds. This is an *intellectual* aim, though some commentators avoid using that word because for many it connotes elitism or irrelevance. Nonetheless, this emphasis cuts across virtually all statements today, from Mortimer Adler's *Paideia* manifesto to ASCD Executive Director Gordon Cawelti's redefinition of general education.

Problems are almost inevitable. John Goodlad, in his major study, *A Place Called School*, observes that the "back-to-basics movement has merely reinforced in teachers what they do most of the time anyway" (p. 14). He finds much fault with this. Lecturing and drill, Goodlad and others believe, are not what is needed, and certainly do not promote the learning of complex reasoning skills.

Are the "basics" a set of facts and skills organized into "subjects" that are to be mastered? Or, are they a way of thinking and knowing? Obviously, they must be both. We must avoid presenting the "basics" merely as a list of subjects to be emphasized.

In contemporary discussion *intellect* and *excellence* have been merged: An excellent education is assumed to be one in which the students show they can use their minds well by excelling in traditional ways at academic subjects. This connection of excellence, intellect, and traditional academic fare is hardly new, of course. It goes far back in our history and has been frequently and eloquently restated during the last 150 years.

However, what is interesting about today's statements on the purpose of secondary education is what is *not* explicitly stated, but which is unequivocally implicit — that the truly *comprehensive* high school is no longer to be. Few people talk about non-intellectual goals — the affective domain, for example, or the ways and means of learning how to become an adult. The current belief is that the American should be informed, intelligent, and flexible. Whether or not he or she is, for example, an ethical person is not a primary issue.

Schools are not to be involved in virtue, or in adjusting adolescents to life, or specifically preparing their students for all aspects of living, such as parenthood, a specific job, the use of leisure time, or making it as a single person in a big city. The assumptions embedded in the current initiatives are

either that these topics are unworthy or inappropriate for formal study in school, or that intelligent persons can figure them out on their own.

Likewise, schools today are not presented as places for social engineering. Many of the reports imply that schools should support and strengthen the society, not change it. The shift of emphasis from the optimistic activism of the 1960s is striking. The almost breathless faith in schooling that characterized the rhetoric of the 1950s is absent, and the reformist optimism of the Lyndon Johnson years is gone. Robert Hampel writes of the "fading romanticism" of the late 1970s. Perhaps today's reports are more realistic that their earlier counterparts. Schools in the 1980s are not expected to solve all of America's ills.

The "back-to-basics" trend, which dates from the early 1970s, sparked shifts to more traditional requirements in secondary schools, starting as early as 1972 in some school systems. Public concern about what caused the decline in Scholastic Aptitude Test scores fueled some of this change. The "competency testing" movement, while aimed primarily at elementary level studies, added another pervasive dimension.

Suffice it to say that the current reform statements lend legitimacy and fresh urgency to this "return to the basics" ideology, even if some of the practical and philosophical issues are still largely unaddressed. How can the claims of excellence and equity be practically and fairly accommodated? If the school's aims are no longer to be fully comprehensive, what programs or emphases will be jettisoned, and how? If "higher order thinking skills" are an important goal, how can the resources for learning and teaching these skills successfully be made available? If the discussion of basics goes beyond listing the titles of subjects, serious and as yet unresolved issues will emerge.

2. *The Economy and Work*

Several of the reports emphasize the connection between school, the work life after graduation, and the health of the American economy. This is no surprise. This country's economic order is troubled: At best, it is in the midst of a strained transition; and at worst, it is in the process of serious dislocation and decline. Given this concern, the reports' focus on general intellectual abilities may seem strange. One would have expected calls for beefed-up vocational training. The committees and commentators, however, seem to agree that general intellectual skills are necessary for everyone who works in a modern, rapidly changing, and technology-driven economy. A concern for the basics and a concern for vocationally-oriented schooling are not necessarily, one concludes, in opposition.

Interestingly, business, usually represented by executives of large, technology-related industries, has shown renewed interest in school issues. Some of this concern is, surely, for the common good: America needs fine schools. Some of the concern is also self-serving: business needs literate, resourceful, and dependable workers, and the schools must be reshaped to produce them.

What is not clear in the current spate of reports is how, beyond a

dependence on the basics, this is to happen. Educators talk of collaboration and joint planning, but the practical issue of how the curriculum and climate of the high school are to be brought to bear on the goal of training effective workers is fuzzy, at least beyond the obvious points that potential laborers need to be literate and mathematically adept. Beyond calling for joint efforts to solve problems, no direction is clear.

All this tentativeness is not surprising, given the major changes evolving in the American labor force. The much-heralded high-tech future is fine, but it does not call for labor on the scale of increasingly displaced heavy industry. Seven to 10 percent unemployment persists, it seems, and will continue to do so, even as the economy, in other respects, booms. The growing number of foreign-born workers and the decline of appropriate job opportunities in certain densely-populated regions of the United States further exacerbate the problem. At the same time, the country's continuing need for low-skill workers is swept under the rug; the issue will remain there as long as the flow of immigrants is maintained.

At the edge of business' concern are new ideas about work itself; issues concerning power, authority, and control of production. A report such as *In Search of Excellence: Lessons from America's Best-Run Companies*, by Peters and Waterman, attracts wide and favorable interest. Japanese and European models of cooperative and decentralized control are in vogue; their attractiveness arises today less out of collectivist ideology than simple productivity. How these will affect American labor practices is uncertain, and the tentativeness of experts about the design of work-related schooling must be seen in this light. Indeed, this tentativeness is prudent, given the state of crisis in the American workplace.

3. *AUTHORITY*

A less articulated, but no less important theme, addresses *authority* — who has it in schools and for what reasons. Current wisdom suggests that students should have less authority and adults should have more. The common form this argument takes concerns curricular electives; most commentators assert that students take too many electives for their own good. In all, the amount of time students are allowed to plan for themselves will shrink, and even the options from which they may ultimately select will be limited.

The rhetoric surrounding this emphasis is reminiscent of Marine boot camp. We must "toughen up" the program, "stiffen" it, "beef it up," and make it "more demanding" and full of "rigor." Words and notions such as "responsiveness," "adaptation," or "support" — 1960s words — are not used. One senses the image of stern, exasperated adult America putting its collective foot down.

Much public concern has swirled around the issue of discipline. This has arisen from the sense in the 1970s that too much student freedom led to too little real learning, and that some of America's schools were notably unsafe places. In discussion, the separate issues of safety and discipline merged; in order to be safe, a school had to be orderly. The current view is that high

schools should be visibly orderly places — for reasons of safety and for learning — with the adults firmly in charge, telling students what and when to study most of the time. The adults' expectations for the students, their studies, and their behavior, authorities agree, should be high — higher than in the past.

Interesting stirrings suggest that this focus could soon be freshly challenged. A number of books about the ill effects of excessive adult pressure on young children have received approving reviews. A few scholars point out that adolescence is a time of special turmoil, and the academic and career pressure on these young people should be eased, rather than "beefed up." Compulsory schooling might usefully end at 16, they say. A period of two or three years thereafter for public service or some other constructive activity — almost a moratorium — is suggested. The incongruity of this view and that of making the life of adolescents more "rigorous" is interesting.

Authority in schools is, of course, hostage to perceptions of authority outside of schools. It is no surprise that adult credibility in schools suffered during the latter days of the Vietnam conflict and during Watergate. Indeed, a kind of pop movement which preached that youth had all the answers their elders seemed to lack flourished briefly in the late 1960s. The steadier, if duller, years of the mid and late 1970s and early 1980s stand in contrast; the conservative response to questions of law and order and of civil obedience took hold, inevitably affecting the schools.

Questions of authority affect teachers as well as students, and the authors of the various current reports and books are especially interested in teachers. If the reform efforts of the 1960s focused on the students, those of the 1980s will be remembered as ones that highlighted their instructors. Most commentators stress the central importance of teachers and lament the lack of respect and support given them by society. Most predict a growing crisis not only in the low academic qualifications of teachers, but also in the diminishing numbers of able recruits.

Paradoxically, however, the fresh authority specified in many reports does not reach these instructors — something that one might expect to happen if we wish to raise teachers' status and make the role autonomous enough to attract strong candidates. On the contrary, the new authority flows primarily from regulation of courses required for the high school diploma, of examinations controlled by central authorities, of precise daily regimens and yearly calendars set by people outside of the classroom or school building.

Even more ironic is the fact that there is an opposite trend underway in progressive American business — devolved authority. While many commentators say they support building level decision making, the effect of their total package is to hobble the individual teacher even more. Wry school people may reflect that they lost a third of their authority to students in the 1960s, and now will lose another third to the educational hierarchy. Teachers remain what Michael Lipsky (1980) calls "street level bureaucrats."

4. State Control

The greatest gains in authority have been made by state government. While schooling is constitutionally a state obligation, in most regions of the country the most significant power has long resided in local authorities. The first quiet signals that this power would change came in the 1960s, with James Bryant Conant's call for renewed state involvement (which led to the Education Commission of the States), and with Title V of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, which provided federal funds to strengthen state departments of education. Nonetheless, the predominant reformist rhetoric of the 1950s was on the central importance of local school boards, and the call in the 1960s was for "community control." And yet the buck still stopped with the states: They had constitutional responsibility for education.

The trend toward state governments' strong assertion of control greatly accelerated in the 1970s. Responsibility for equalizing funding across school districts was, starting with the California *Serrano* decision, unequivocally given to state government. A political revolt against the property tax — the mainstay of public schools in many states — gained force, again most visibly in California, with "Proposition 13." State aid was required in each instance, followed by increased state authority.

Thus, it is no surprise that leadership of the current wave of reform efforts has come disproportionately from state governments. Governors have been conspicuously present; the contrast between their visibility now and their invisibility in the late 1960s is striking. Most of the reform initiatives which have already been put into place are found in state laws and regulations — high school diploma requirements, teacher certification rules, and school schedule and calendar regulations. On the whole, the much-debated "merit pay" issue is, politically at least, a state issue. The most influential "school boards," it appears, are state legislatures.

One senses the change by noting which groups seem less influential. The coalitions of school superintendents, organized teachers, and Fortune 500 business leaders that shaped policy in the 1950s through White House conferences and local organizations no longer play that role. There is bickering within the profession. And the virtual silence from the university schools of education on issues of national school policy during the last few years is striking. Except for John Goodlad's study of schooling, not one of the major school reform efforts arose out of academia and, beyond the worried comments of a few university presidents, the voices from the universities are faint. In a sense there is a vacuum, and state authority has filled it.

Of all the initiatives present in the early 1980s, this growth of state authority could be the most significant. Devolution of power back to local communities, at least as they were accustomed to exercising it in the 1950s and early 1960s, is impossible. Special-interest lobbying — that political art form so exquisitely developed in the late 1960s and 1970s — prefers centralized authority. It is easier to bargain with the powerful state than with a scattering of local authorities.

5. *Choice*

As is frequently the case, every strong movement seems to provoke a contradictory trend. At the same time that reformers call for firm state standards, equitably applied, they also call — almost as an afterthought — for more autonomy at the individual school level. And, as one trend appears to press for equality and thus similarity among schools, there is a countertrend toward variety among schools, with citizens having a *choice*. The most obvious indication of this trend is the popularity of magnet schools.

Most large public school systems today have one or more much-publicized magnet schools. Few observers deny that such schools reinforce tracking across class lines. Most current reform groups applaud magnets and berate tracking. Yet, by definition, student interest (or *parental* interest) affects the enrollment of a magnet school, and such interest, whether we like to admit it or not, tends to follow class lines.

The ideological inconsistency between the call for truly common schools and the admiration for magnets is too painful for many to articulate, and so the issue is left in the closet. The notion that parents should have options is gaining strength at the same time state government is increasing its concern with schools. These trends do not necessarily have to be in precise opposition, but even if they are not, the results will produce public school systems where power, once held by the school board and the superintendent, may shift to the state *and* to the particular interests of organized parents and their allies around one sort of magnet or another.

Some magnets, of course, have long been socially-sheltered suburban public or private schools. The more that the autonomy of suburban schools is eroded by state mandate, the more likely it is that the private schools will grow. Americans have long lived with the inconsistency that "all men (and women) are created equal" and that parents assert they want "the best for our *own* children." Whatever aggressive parents think is "the best," they will push for; few really do want an "equal" education for their offspring.

Magnets, public or private, have their appeal, and their proponents represent special interest lobbies at the state house door. Whether the tactic is state-operated special schools, such as the North Carolina School of Science and Mathematics, or citywide public magnet schools, or suburban schools with special freedom (such as the ability to raise private money for their extra programs), or private schools (via some device such as tuition tax credits or vouchers), the trend toward *choice* for parents is an enduring movement which accelerated during the 1970s.

6. *Measurable Results*

Social science first appeared as a national authority in school matters in the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education, et al.* decision. The research by sociologists about childrens' self-esteem and academic progress significantly affected the views of the Supreme Court, and were duly footnoted by it to that effect. Since that time, the authority given psychologists and sociometricians has risen sharply.

The late 1950s and 1960s were the heyday of the educational testing movement. The Congress, in the Civil Rights Act of 1964, mandated a massive social survey of segregated and integrated schooling, to show (our legislators firmly believed) the unquestionable superiority of the latter. The belief that the effects of schooling could and should be measured was widespread by the early 1970s and spawned the competency test movement, "outcomes" curricula, and similar efforts.

All this testing produced results that often offended the public. The so-called Coleman report of 1966 only seemed to confuse the picture of racially segregated schools. Competency tests showed levels of student illiteracy that shocked even the strongest defenders of public education. Test scores quickly became the primary measure of how a school was doing, even though the testers themselves kept pleading that their instruments measured only *some* of the outcomes of schooling and, even among these, often crudely.

It is not surprising, then, that test scores play a central part in the early 1980s school critiques. Some critics come close to recommending a "payment by results" system, in which schools or teachers that produce students who score well on tests get bonuses of one kind or another.

The key word has come to be *accountability*. Where it used to mean merely the approbation of parents, or whatever political constituency controlled the school's finances, it now also means giving a good account in terms of student test scores.

Some magnet schools deal with this issue by admitting only students who already do well on tests; needless to say, their seniors' test scores look good. Some school systems try to make their case through year-by-year comparisons, by which (they hope) to show an upward trend.

Even though standardized testing unquestionably carries with it some significant class bias, and even though standardized tests currently measure only some parts of what many schools consider their goals, test scores are firmly implanted as benchmarks by which schools are judged. The current crop of statements legitimizes this, often in the most telling of ways — by assuming, without qualification, that "excellence" means high test scores.

7. Cost

A muted but powerful theme running through much current school reform literature is the cost of education. Baldly put, many feel schools cost too much; at best, schools should get little further financial aid. Whatever aid one or another report suggests, it is both categorical — moneys for special purposes such as master teachers — and strikingly limited in scale. While some groups suggest a wide variety of new programs and initiatives, the silence about money, on the whole, tells us a great deal: The issue isn't openly addressed because many of the commentators believe relatively little new money will be available for elementary and secondary education.

This hard reality has been emerging since the late 1960s. For several reasons, including both a shrinking respect for the effectiveness of schools that followed from the release of test score data and a protracted international

economic depression, money available for primary and secondary education plateaued in the 1970s, and in many communities went sharply down — a situation that flabbergasted many educators who started their careers in the late 1950s and early 1960s.

There will be a crunch here, between the public's heightened expectations for the schools and an essentially steady supply of dollars. Reform by addition is no longer an option, as it was in the 1960s. To get the money to pay more to science and mathematics teachers, for example, will require taking it out of someone else's pockets. Declining enrollments have masked some of this inevitable reallocation, but it will become ever more visible.

The way out of this crunch is unclear, at least in the eyes of most current commentators. Large portions of most public school budgets are mandated by state or federal regulation (even though the dollars so allocated may in part have to be raised locally), and the special interest lobbies protecting that earmarked money are powerful. Collective bargaining has created its own sorts of mandates. The room to maneuver is very tight.

Ultimately, the solutions have to lie in the programs offered — or no longer offered. However comfortable we may be with the conventionally-structured, multi-program comprehensive high school, the fact is inescapable that its structure is costly and, in some respects, fundamentally unproductive. The task before us will be to devise new structures which are both educationally productive and financially realistic. No challenge before school people is as difficult as this restructuring, and none is more urgent.

Other Trends

Such, then, are seven dominant themes running through much of the current commentary about schools. There are others, and there are disagreements among commentators and commissions about the issues. For example, some believe that our schools are in serious trouble, whether this is phrased in purple language (as in the case of the Excellence Commission) or in careful pastels (as in the rhetoric of John Goodlad). Others, such as Ernest Boyer, sense that our schools, while troubled, are already on the way toward significant improvement.

On a different tack, Seymour Sarason (1983) and David Seeley (1981) ask difficult, divergent sorts of questions than those generally addressed by the commission reports. Sarason, for example, challenges axioms about schools and schoolkeeping that most educators and commentators take wholly for granted. Some, such as the College Board's EQuality Project, have deliberately focused on a limited set of issues, in this case the academic expectations of college-bound high school graduates. Others, such as Sara Lightfoot (1983) and Philip Cusick (1983), paint careful verbal portraits of high schools and leave the implications of those images for readers to ponder.

There are silences, too. The issues which might reasonably be dominant trends are not. The heroic moral and political questions of nuclear holocaust, runaway population growth, and ecological disaster face younger generations with doomsday choices of a character exponentially graver than those we

inherited. Should schools address these issues directly? The atrophy of many American political institutions is no less a concern than are economic worries, but only the imperatives of the second seem to dominate our thinking about schools.

The stunning national cultural homogeneity that has flowed from television is rarely mentioned as an important trend for education. And the concern for a "good" and decent society, issues which so concerned our nineteenth century predecessors, are muted or absent in contemporary commentaries. The purposeful individual is, by implication, the good person; but is that vision, one asks, enough? At their founding, all great school and university systems have had their roots in one powerful ideology or another. What is ours today? Merely "making it"?

In sum, while the seven dominant themes I have outlined are pervasive, there is disagreement and, perhaps, an agenda is yet to be examined. Some find the lack of comprehensive consensus among our studies unsettling and wish we could find common ground. However, too much consensus at this stage would be a bad thing.

High schools are complicated places, and the complex American culture in which they are embedded is also experiencing wrenching changes. Some legitimate consensus is nice, but it must not be forced. What we need more of today is serious debate. The differences among the current statements about schooling need to be highlighted and publicly analyzed. The gaps in the analyses need to be filled. Only from such a process can the best emerge for our schools and the young people they serve.

A Study of High Schools

Let me now turn to our own work. The principal publications arising from our study, which has been cosponsored by NASSP and the Commission on Educational Issues of the National Association of Independent Schools, will be released during 1984.

Of the three books to be issued by A Study of High Schools, the first to be published will be *Horace's Compromise: The Dilemma of the American High School.* Horace, a central character in the book (which is in part a collection of stories arising from my observations of schools), is a representative, devoted, veteran English teacher in a suburban high school. The compromises that he has to make even there, given the structure of his school, create the intolerable dilemma which is the theme of the book.

Robert Hampel's history of high schools since 1940 will be published during the spring of 1984. A third volume, an analysis of themes that emerged from careful field observations in 15 high schools during the '81-'82 school year, will be prepared by several of my colleagues and issued late in '84. All of these books will be published by Houghton Mifflin Company.

A summary of our preliminary findings appeared in the October 1983 *NASSP Bulletin,* entitled "Essential Schools: A First Look." I will not repeat the details recounted there but, rather, try to place our work in the context of the larger, overall high school reform movement.

Like most of our colleagues who have been studying secondary schools, we are creatures of our times and, like them, have been affected by the trends we are experiencing in education. Specifically:

- We believe that the high schools' goal should be to help adolescents learn how to use their minds well, to think clearly and imaginatively, and to be well-informed. We reject the notion of a truly comprehensive school; such a thing is actually unattainable in any event, and the central intellectual goal of the school inevitably will absorb the majority of the time available.
- On the other hand, we challenge the assumption that an "excellent" education is necessarily the sum of credit hours of English, mathematics, social studies, science, and modern language. We seek a simpler, more coherent curriculum, and we argue that a few things well learned are preferable to a program that tries to cover a great sweep of knowledge with inescapable superficiality.
- We focus heavily on pedagogy, and on the relationships between students and teachers (the always-necessary "treaties" among them). For most high school studies, we favor the pedagogies of "coaching" and "questioning" as outlined in Mortimer Adler's *Paideia Proposal.* We argue for renewed emphasis on personalized programming, in order to take full advantage of important new information about students' differing learning styles.
- We stress the importance of incentives for students and for teachers, and propose that the high school diploma be awarded on the basis of students' exhibition of their mastery of the subject, rather than on the basis of the number of credits or units.
- We have no surer answer than anyone else to the problem of effectively connecting the school to the world of work. As do most other commentators, we argue that in the face of rapidly changing employment conditions a general education that stresses flexibility is the best suggestion.
- We urge greater authority be given to individual schools, with the power of governing authorities — local and state — focused on competency tests and diploma exhibitions. Issues of means — how a particular school should function — should be left to those people responsible for that school. We deplore the current readiness of state authorities to dictate universal means of education to all schools.
- We recommend that, for the benefit of their own education, more responsibility be given to students than is now often the case. We argue that the only way one learns how to learn is by being expected to do so. Giving students more responsibility would not (indeed, must not) result in the self-indulgent anarchy some feared after the experiments of the 1960s.
- We support policies of "choice" on the grounds that there is no "one best school" for all students, and that schools should be encouraged to develop their own special climates and styles. The dangers of class, race, and ethnic segregation can at least be blunted, if never eliminated, by a combination of incentives and strict supervision of nondiscriminatory access policies. Some groups in our society — particularly children from low-income

families — have special needs, and government should discriminate financially in favor of schools that serve them.

- We argue that value issues cannot and should not be ignored in schools, and that decency — fairness, generosity, and tolerance — should infuse every school, public or private.
- We accept the fact that changes such as diploma-by-exhibition, greater responsibility by and expectations for adolescents, and personalized programming have substantial organizational consequences; and we urge school authorities to experiment with newly-structured high schools grounded on the principles we have identified, these schools to operate at a per-pupil cost that is at or near existing levels.
- We agree with many of our colleague commentators that teachers are key actors (as are students, we argue). The teaching force will not live up to its existing potential or gain able new recruits unless the working conditions in schools improve. These conditions include faculty-student ratios of no more than 1:80 and substantial professional autonomy. They also imply team teaching and a hierarchy of teachers. In the absence of vast new school budget increases, such policies require substantially restructured schools.

In essence, some of our findings coincide with the trends, and in this sense we join our colleagues in legitimizing them. Yet, too much about high schools is not productive. Their routines do not square with what we know about learning, adolescents, and teaching. Those familiar and comfortable frameworks may in fact be getting in the way. The more we honestly poke at our conventions, the more we find we may challenge them. This should not surprise us; the basic structure of our schools was set in the 1890s, and conditions are different now. *We must change that structure.*

Our study has no certain remedy or perfect new design, but we have some solid questions and some well-informed hunches of how to proceed. What we need now are educators, their governing authorities, and a group of pioneer adolescents and their parents who are willing to risk trying something very new — restructuring our high schools to improve them. A decade hence — the minimum time needed for institutional engineering of this sort — we'll have a better idea of what might work. All we are absolutely sure of now is that the existing structure is seriously flawed.

What Principals Can Do

Many of our colleagues will be frustrated by the fact that our study's most important remedies are long-term. Many citizens will be clamoring for answers. The gaggle of reports being issued these days, most of them critical, will put great pressure on school people.

We have heard bits of advice for educators, and pass them along:

1. Be informed. Read the various reports and books carefully. Urge staff members and citizens to do the same. The reports demonstrate how complicated the problems of high school education are, and how unhelpful

slogans and quick-fix remedies are. An informed constituency will be an understanding, helpful constituency.

2. Seize the most promising of the recommendations and make them your own. For example, if you believe that your school should give greater emphasis to mathematics and science and expand offerings in computer science, use the reports to legitimize and assert your efforts to achieve these ends.
3. Engage your teachers in discussions of the reports. They and their problems are at the center of much of the public debate. Explore the "compromises" your teachers are forced to make: What can be done now to lessen those pressures? Can conditions under which your staff works be improved this year?
4. Try to teach regularly, not only to serve as an example, but to get personal contact with some of the daily nitty-gritty your teachers experience. Teaching is the central business for adults in schools; a principal must be directly engaged in it. Any principal who "doesn't have time" for this needs to reassess his or her priorities.
5. Expect more from students. What can they do to ease the load on the staff? Look at the incentives that operate in your school: What do students and teachers value most? How can that goal or those goals be employed to promote learning?
6. Resist as vigorously as possible the spread of district or state regulations that awkwardly standardize the way you conduct your programs. Argue that, given the rich variety among students and teachers, standardized practices almost surely will lead to lower standards for some teachers. Argue that good teachers expect reasonable autonomy, and that the more autonomy a school loses, the more good teachers it will lose or fail to hire.
7. If you have some faculty and board support, try to design an "exhibition" for graduation: How could the accumulated learning of a student be fairly assessed? Begin the inquiry by using the College Board's recent report, "Academic Preparation for College: What Students Need To Know and Be Able To Do." While it is aimed at the college-bound, its approach is readily adaptable for all students. This exercise will quickly flounder, as the arbitrary divisions among subjects, and thus among your school's traditional departments, will break down. Expect that floundering, and be patient. What will emerge in time is a fresh statement of the school's academic goals.
8. Don't lose your sense of humor, and remember that no student has ever died of a high school education. The 10-year reform cycle suggests that you might have three to five tranquil years ahead.

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